

What's My Line?

Occupations of Utah Women

"An incident which calls up the privileges which the women of Utah enjoy, lately occurred in Salt Lake City, Miss Phoebe Couzens, of St. Louis and Miss Georgie Snow, daughter of the Attorney General of the Territory, were admitted to the bar in the District, and the ceremonies were imposing."

*Excerpt from
The Missouri Republican,
"The Oppressed
Women of Utah," 1872*

For years, feminists have talked about the "pink collar ghetto." They aren't referring to a physical location, but instead the segregation or "crowding" of women—through tradition, culture, discrimination, or personal choice—into certain occupations.

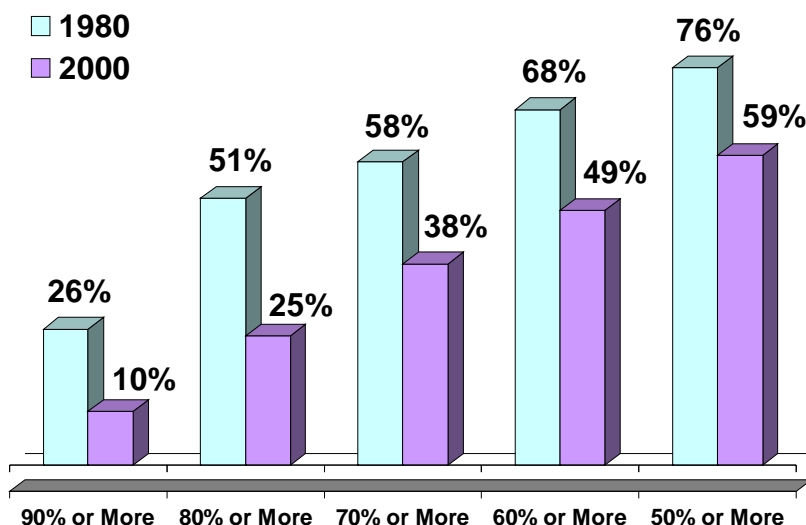
Women have certainly begun to break out of those traditional jobs into employment that in the past was typically held by men. We have two female Supreme Court justices, female astronauts, women construction workers, female engineers, female doctors and

on infinitum. But, can casual observation tell the whole story? The data suggests not.

Change can be Slow

Of course, when you're talking about almost half the labor force, change will probably be slow. And, the times, they are a-changin'. Back in 1980, one-fourth of Utah women worked in an occupation where at least 90 percent of the profession was held by women. By 2000, the comparable share had dropped to 10 percent. Even in 1980, three-fourths of all women worked in occupations where at least 50 percent of the occupation was female compared to 60 percent in 2000. In other words, even though traditional female occupations continue to attract many women, many other women are moving out into occupations previously dominated by men.

Utah Female Share of Total Occupation by Individual Occupation's Female Share 1980 and 2000



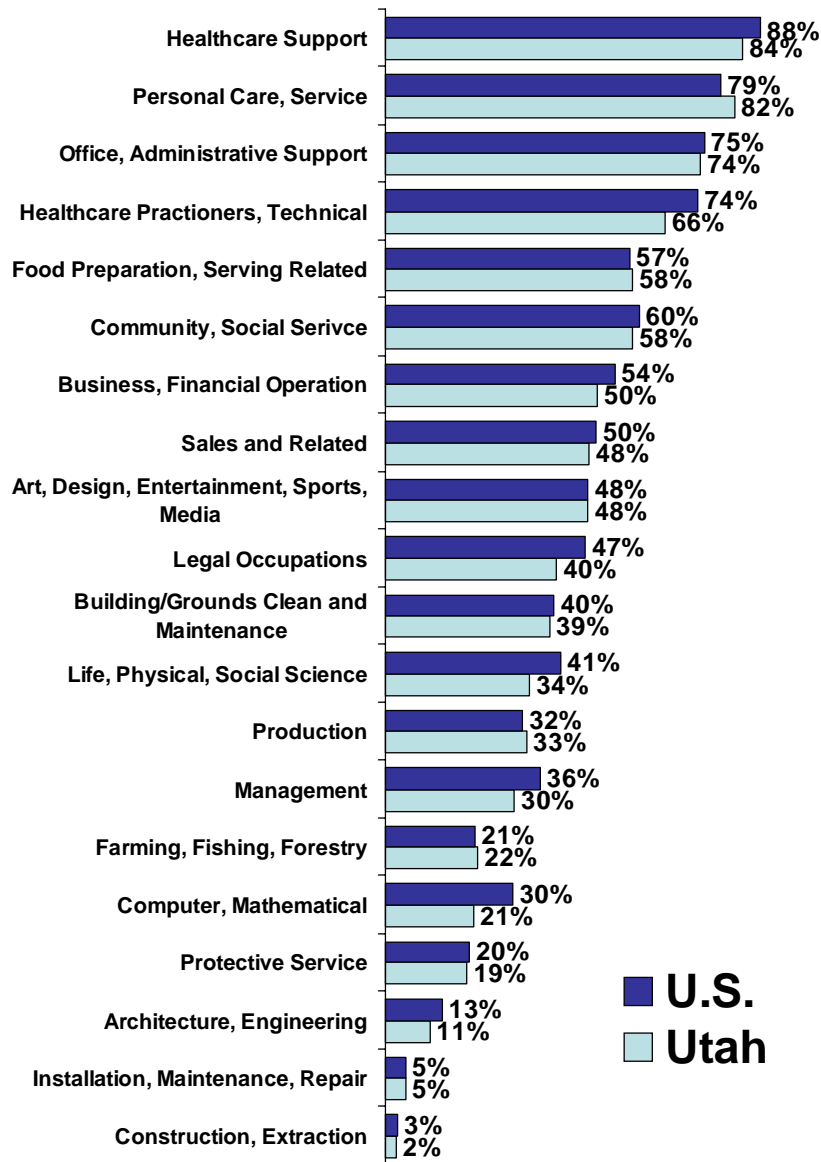
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Group Hug

A change in the occupational coding structure and the way in which the Census Bureau publishes data makes comparisons over time problematic—particularly since the major groups have changed dramatically. However, data from the 2000 Census certainly reveals that women are still concentrated in certain occupational groups.

Which major occupational group is most dominated by females? Roughly 84 percent of Utah healthcare-support occupations are held by women. Healthcare-support occupations in-

Female Percentage of Major Occupational Groups, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

clude lower-skilled healthcare positions such as aides, orderlies, assistants, and massage therapists. These occupations are the lowest-paying jobs in healthcare.

Close behind is the personal care and service occupations group. This group includes cosmetologists, amusement/recreation attendants, child care workers, flight attendants, etc. Again, many of these positions are low-paying.

Other major occupational groups that contain high concentrations of women are administrative support (secretaries, receptionists, etc.), healthcare practitioners (such as nurses and doctors), food preparation occupations, and community/social service occupations (such as social workers and counselors).

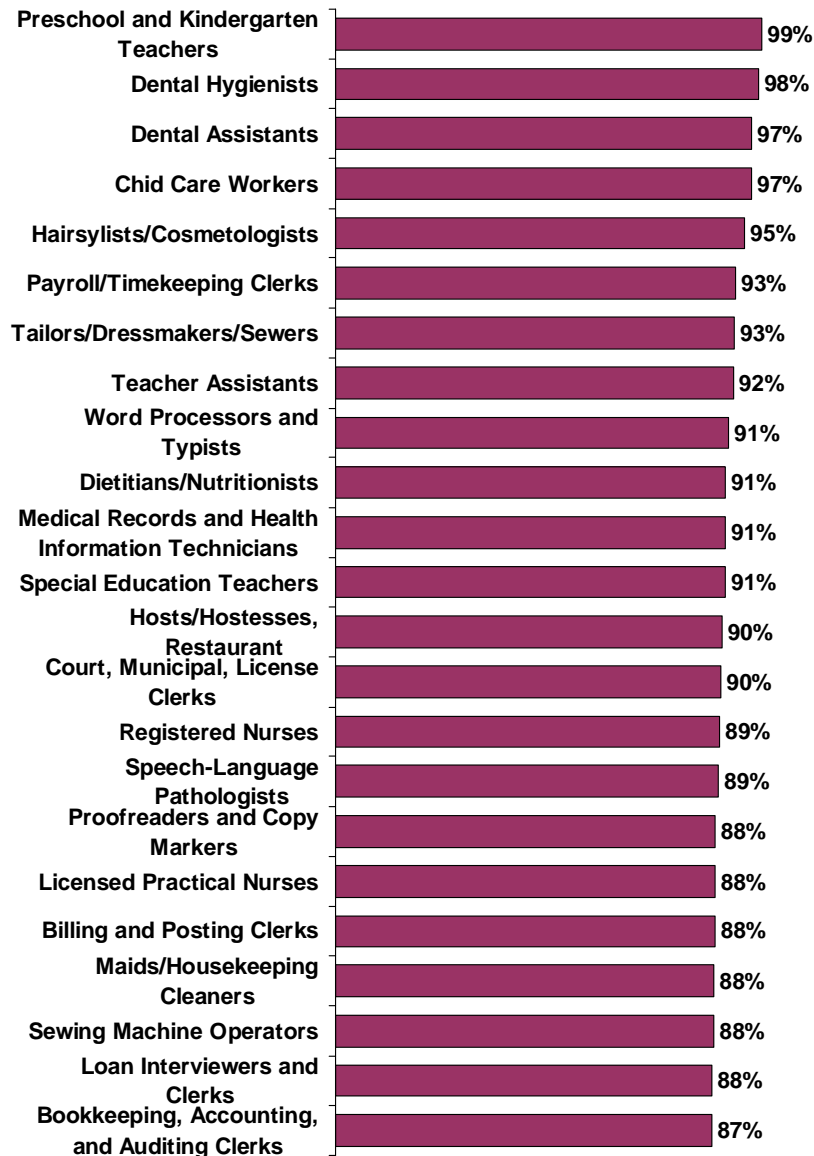
Men's Club

Several major occupational groups constitute almost a "men only" club. For example, women hold only 2 percent of construction and mining positions. In addition, women constitute only 5 percent of installation/maintenance/repair workers. Also, only 11 percent of architects and engineers are women.

It's in the Details

Which *individual* occupations are dominated by Utah women? For the most part, they can be found within the major occupational groups dominated by women.

Utah Female Share of Female Dominated Occupations, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

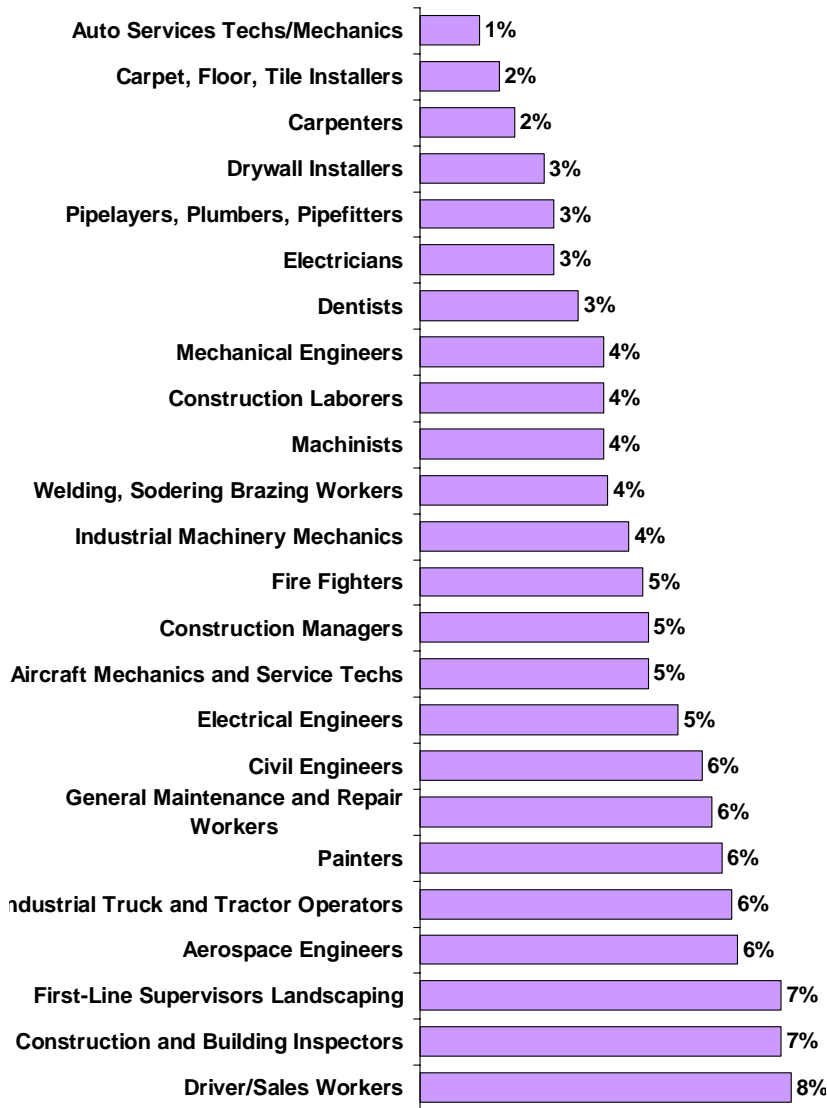
Preschool/kindergarten teachers are 99 percent female and women hold 98 percent of all dental hygienist positions. Other occupations that are at least 90 percent female include child care workers, hairstylists/cosmetologists, payroll clerks, tailors/dressmakers, teacher assistants, word processors/typists, dietitians, medical records technicians, special education teachers, hosts/hostesses, and court/municipal clerks.

Which occupations exhibit a dearth of women workers? Only 1 percent of auto services techs/mechanics are female. Other occupations with few women include many construction occupations, dentists, machinists and mechanical engineers. All these occupations are less than 5-percent female.

Utah Versus the U.S.

How does Utah's occupational segregation stack up against the U.S. figures? For the most part, there's not a whole lot of difference. However, a higher percentage of U.S. computer/mathematical jobs, healthcare practitioners, business/financial operation occupations, life/physical/social scientists, and architecture/engineering occupations are held by women. The difference is particularly striking in computer/mathematical positions where females make up only 20 percent of Utah workers compared to 30 percent of U.S. workers.

Utah Female Share of Male Dominated Occupations, 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

This data seems to suggest that Utah women have been slower to enter male-dominated occupations than their U.S. counterparts. This difference may account for at least part of the larger-than-average male/female wage gap experienced by Utah.

Making a Change

Now, let's take a quick look at a handful of male-dominated occupations and female-dominated occupations to see how Utah women's occupational choices have changed over the past 20 years.

Interestingly, some female-dominated occupations have become even more concentrated with women. For example, in 1980, roughly 66 percent of all elementary school teachers were female. By 2000, Utah women had increased their share of this occupation to 78 percent. Female cosmetologists increased their occupation share from 89 percent in 1980 to 95 percent in 2000. On the other hand, many female-dominated occupations have incorporated more men between 1980 and 2000. (See chart.)

On the flip side women are making inroads into many male-dominated occupations. For example, between 1980 and 2000, Utah women doubled their share of the mail carrier occupation to 30 percent. Utah women also account for a higher share of physicians, engineers, lawyers, and police/detectives.

Nevertheless, Utah women held a smaller share of auto mechanic and truck driving jobs in 2000 than they did in 1980. It appears, in general, that college-educated women are making more inroads into male-dominated occupations than are non-college-educated women.

So What?

It's obvious from the charts in this section that some occupations continue to be dominated by men and others by women—despite some notable movement. So what? Why should anyone care if occupational segregation remains in the workplace?

The argument may be that women are just more suited for these kinds of jobs. But, one research laboratory found there is no sex difference in 14 of 22 inherent aptitudes and knowledge areas; in the remaining areas, women excel in six, men excel in two.

Everyone's Problem

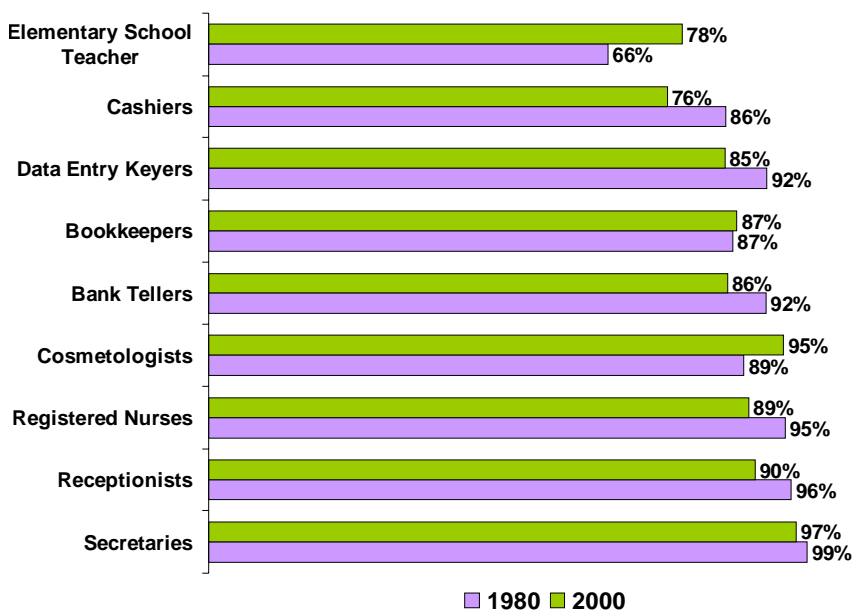
In reality, occupational segregation creates a number of problems for the entire economy. For women, jobs that are typically associated with their gender generally rank near the bottom of the pay scale (nurses and dental hygienist are the exceptions that prove the rule).

In a society where a substantial number of households are headed by single women, this issue soon becomes everyone's issue. If these women are unable to support their families because they tend to choose low-paying traditional female jobs, society ends up providing the necessary additional sustenance for these families.

Moreover, most married women in Utah work outside the home. A married woman's earnings affect not only her well-being but the well-being of her husband and children. In other words, if women are relegated—for whatever reason—to certain low-paying jobs, it affects the community at large.

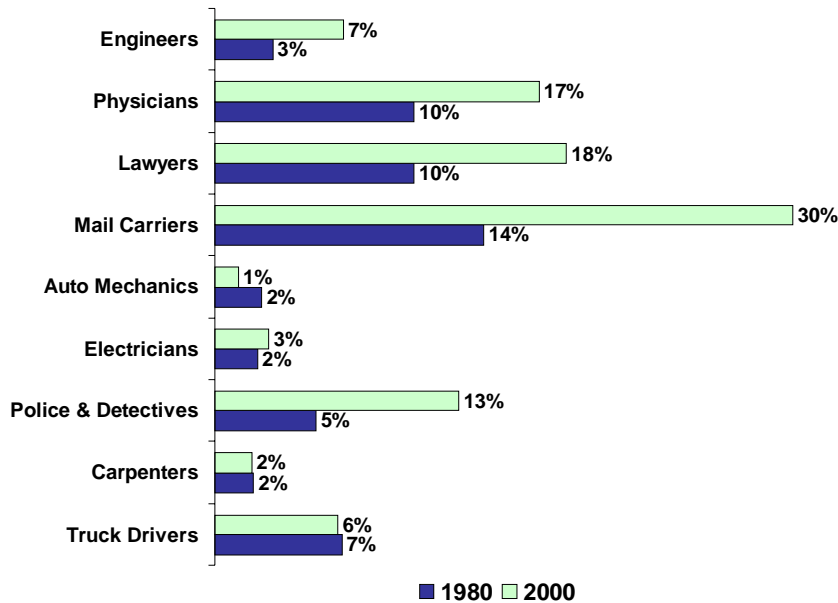
In addition, sex stereotyping of jobs yields other unfavorable consequences. When women are concentrated into certain occupations, regardless of their abilities, talents, or knowl-

Utah Female Share of Selected Female-Dominated Professions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Utah Female Share of Selected Male-Dominated Professions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

edge, the whole economy loses through an under-utilization of resources or the inefficient allocation of those resources. The country ends up with substantially less productivity than is possible at a notable economic cost. Underemployment or less productive employment of women deprives everyone of increased economic well-being—not just women and their children.

Who Built the Walls?

Why do women congregate in specific occupations? After all, Utah women are hardly forced as part of some great diabolical governmental plan into

certain positions. Why do they tend to flock together? Here are some possible answers:

- Women may consciously trade higher wages, chances for greater advancement, and job status for the flexibility and reduced demands they believe female occupations usually offer. *In other words, women may choose these jobs because they want to—in order to integrate home and work life. Unfortunately, many nontraditional jobs actually offer more flexibility plus the advantage of a higher wage.*
- Despite evidence to the contrary, many women underestimate substantially the chances that they will work. *Remember, in Utah, most married women and mothers work outside the home. Yet, many young women fail to make a good occupational choice early in life based on that reality. They have the “Prince Charming Syndrome”—the belief that someone will take care of them financially. Many women fail to plan adequately for the future.*
- Women may select predominately female occupations because they think they are the only positions open to them. *Socialization may lead women to believe that they qualify only for certain jobs.*

- Women may be afraid (because of low self-esteem) to choose a job outside the norm. *Fears of sexual harassment, of trying something different, of having to work mostly with men or of failing in a “man’s” world often keep women out of male-dominated occupations. They choose a more comfortable path.*
- Women may be denied access to certain jobs because of sexual discrimination. *Employers might prefer men for some jobs. These employers may believe women are not as committed to the job as men. They may believe that women shouldn’t be working at all. Male employers may prefer to hire men because they feel more comfortable with them.*

Her Own Boss

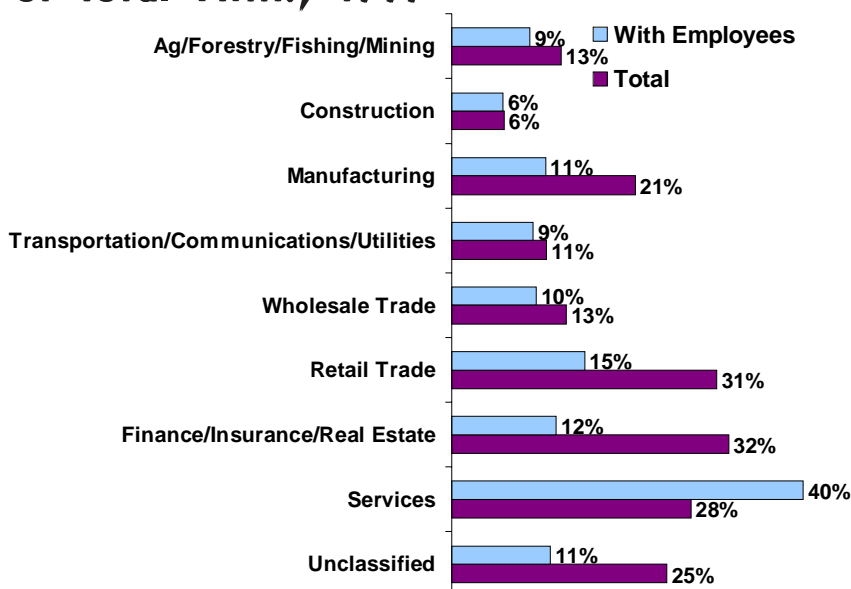
Many women are bypassing employment in favor of running their own businesses. During 1997 (the most recent data available), women owned almost one-fourth of all Utah businesses. In addition, the number of women-owned businesses increased more than 40 percent between 1987 and 1997. Women owned 11 percent of all Utah businesses with paid employees in 1997.

Utah women-owned firms with employees tend to be concentrated in the service industry. In 1997, these firms accounted for 40-percent of all service industry businesses with employees.

Finally

All in all, while many women are making progress into traditionally male-dominated occupations, the change is slow. College-educated women seem to be integrating more quickly than their less-educated sisters. Since occupational choice is at the heart of the wage gap, occupational integration remains an important issue.

Utah Women-Owned Businesses as Share of Total Firms, 1997



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.